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The KGB's Bead on the Media

Taking Exception

Stephen S. Rosenfeld recently wrote an article about two journalists, "close to [Alexander] Haig," who have written a novel—"The Spike"—that makes "a deadly charge of journalistic corruption," namely the notion that the Soviet KGB manipulates the Western media by "disinformation" operations. An incredulous Rosenfeld further points out that Robert Moss, my co-author, has carried the charge into the real-life arena. Count me in, too.

I am sure that Rosenfeld would agree that Dr. Andrei Sakharov's liberal credentials are beyond challenge. Sakharov invented the Soviet H-bomb and was a member in good standing of the Soviet establishment, with access to the Kremlin for many years, before becoming Russia's leading dissident. From his KGB-imposed exile in Gorki, Sakharov managed to smuggle out a long letter a year ago that was published as the cover story of the June 8, 1980, New York Times Magazine. If Rosenfeld read Sakharov's letter carefully, how could he dismiss with such alacrity our revelations about KGB disinformation operations in the Western media?

Sakharov warned us about four categories of agents of influence in Western countries busily promoting Soviet expansionist objectives—which included, according to Sakharov, a great many writers and journalists. That should have elicited some interest from a Soviet expert like Rosenfeld, not to mention a lengthy report released by the House subcommittee on intelligence in February 1980 on Soviet disinformation operations. The U.S. media were excluded from this report because the CIA deemed the subject too sensitive.

First, said Sakharov, there are the ideologically motivated—motivations, he conceded, that were worthy of debate. But second, he explained, there is a category of people who call themselves "progressive" because they consider it "fashionable, prestigious or profitable." A third category, Sakharov wrote, consists of "naive, poorly informed or indifferent people who close their eyes and ears to the bitter truth and eagerly swallow any sweet lie," provided, as Rosenfeld must know from his long experience in Soviet affairs, it is appropriately sugar-coated with disarmament proposals and peace

offensives. Perhaps Rosenfeld will recall that this third category used to be called "useful idiots" by Lenin.

Finally, said Sakharov, there is the fourth group—people who have been "bought in the most direct sense of that word, and not always with money." And here he was referring to "some political figures, businessmen, a great many writers and journalists, government advisers and heads of press and television."

I hope that Rosenfeld will recognize that Sakharov speaks from more intimate knowledge about KGB disinformation operations than he himself ever possessed, even while stationed in Moscow. He may also be interested to know that Dr. Igor Glagolev, a former consultant to the Soviet Politburo and a former member of several prestigious Russian academic institutions, who chose asylum in the United States four years ago, has said that our novel, "The Spike" understates the truth about how the KGB's disinformation operations work inside the Western media.

The KGB's "dysinformatsiya" department was elevated to a full directorate of the Soviet secret service in 1968. Since then, it has averaged more than 600 operations a year in the Western media—Western Europe, Japan, the United States and friendly Third World countries. Much of this work is done through proxy services, such as the Cuban DGI.

Rosenfeld says that Moss and I should name names. Does he really want to trigger a witch hunt and revive McCarthyism in our country? Our purpose was to explain through the vehicle of a political spy novel a little-known but tremendously important aspect of Soviet intelligence inside the Western media.

Isn't Rosenfeld aware that a prominent French journalist, Pierre-Charles Pathé, was tried, convicted and sentenced to five years in jail last May by the French State Security Court after making a full confession? He had worked for the KGB's "disinformation" department for the past 20 years. During that period he had been handled by six KGB case officers. It was not a case of classic espionage. But it was the first time ever to my knowledge that a member of our profession was caught literally red-handed receiving documents (in a

remote section of Paris) from his KGB control agent, which he was to publish as his own work, as he had been doing for years.

Pathé also wrote a private newsletter, financed by the KGB, which was widely quoted, as authoritative because the Soviets had established his reputation with some straight scoops at the beginning of his endeavors for his new masters. Some 400 French parliamentarians, 50 foreign embassies in Paris and about 50 publications and other journalists subscribed to this outlet for Soviet disinformation operations.

I hope Rosenfeld will have a better perspective on the last 13 years—if not the last 64 years—after reading what the then head of the KGB's disinformation department, Gen. Agayants, a brilliant Armenian, told his agents in 1968: "We must constantly encourage Western journalists to write precisely the opposite of our real intentions and anyone who writes or speaks about our real intentions accurately or impartially in the Western sense of these words must quickly be dismissed and ridiculed as someone of the right or a fascist, someone who wants to bring back McCarthyism."

The writer was formerly chief foreign correspondent for Newsweek.